

The Catholic Chaplain Deals
With Matters Sexual

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The objective morality of sexual acts is based upon the teaching of the Church concerning Christian marriage: Genital sexual expression between a man and a woman should take place only in marriage. Apart from the intentions of the man and of the woman, sexual intercourse has a twofold meaning. It is an act of union with the beloved, and it is procreative. Neither meaning may be excluded, although for a variety of reasons, the procreative meaning may not be attained. By their nature homosexual acts exclude all possibility of procreation of life. They are therefore inordinate uses of the sexual faculty. It is assumed, moreover, that the only ordinate use of the sexual faculty must be oriented toward a person of the opposite sex. Sexual acts between members of the same sex are contrary not only to one of the purposes of the sexual faculty, namely, procreation, but also to the other principle purpose, which is to express mutual love between husband and wife. For these reasons homosexual acts are a grave transgression of the goals of human sexuality and of human personality and are consequently contrary to the will of God.①

(an excerpt from Principles to Guide Confessors in Questions of Homosexuality. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1973. pp. 3-4.

In the practice of soldiering, we Chaplains have a unique opportunity to help shape not only the professionalism of a soldier but the human person as well. When we consider what the soldier is - a human being, we are immediately confronted with the complexities that often present themselves when we encounter the individual soldier who might visit us ~~as~~ in the office or off to the side in the field and with the almost proverbial commentary ..."but Chaplain, what am I going to do?"

Often, the personal predicament that the individual soldier finds himself involved in is directly related to and colored by his attitudes and feelings about himself. Pivotal to his self-image is self-knowledge - how well does he know who he is? How well is he able to accurately discern his true worth, his limits, his capabilities and potential? His feelings and judgements about himself bear a direct relationship to his feelings about the people, places and situations that present themselves in his/her world.

Perhaps one of the greatest stumbling blocks to real and personal self-knowledge is the fact that a lot of these soldiers now form, for us, a kind of captive audience - a lot of these soldiers and dependents as well, who are in our spiritual charge find it difficult to locate a forum where they can really be able to really express themselves and where they can get some objective and honest feedback - a forum where they can express how they feel about what it is they find themselves involved in in their personal lives, - how they feel about it and why they feel they are doing whatever it is they are in to.

For the Catholic Chaplain, with the prevailing emphasis on Confession and the other sacraments to buttress our counselling approaches, the pivotal "problem-areas" for many of our military personnel are not new. They are often seen as universal and more often than not speak to the dilemma centering around one's sexuality. If you doubt this, spend a day in the Confessional especially the time just before the Saturday evening and/or Sunday Masses.

I used to believe that the soldier was beyond a lot of this, that, in effect, he had passed through the "particular phase" of his life - if there is one - where this aspect of growing usually incites some concern - but my young ministry has shown me something much to the contrary.

For a great variety of reasons, most relegated to being the fault of some great unknown forces, the same sexual difficulties that are found prevalent in the young soldier's life are the same as those you have heard over and over again in your civilian church confessionals. Something to be considered here, however, is the importance of what and where these soldiers are and what they would be expected to accomplish should our security be threatened. They are expected to be men who are able to detach themselves and become those vital links in our country's defense system.

If a soldier finds himself, to any great and excessive degree, in a quandry regarding those most personal aspects of his own

personal life, it would prove difficult for him, in my opinion, to function with objectivity and thoroughness in his day to day training and responsibility with regard to his job. Take away some of the personal tension in a soldier's life (or provide for its release) and the trooper is ultimately able to function with more objectively-positive incentive and an overall better job performance.

It is not my intention here to elaborate on and devise remedies for such problem areas but moreso to provide some thoughts on how we, as the Catholic Chaplains who might come in contact with such individuals might deal with them.

It would seem to me that before we can even begin to speak of what a man ought to do - his "moral ought" - we ought to attempt to gain some insight into the nature of man - what man is. And one of the major characteristics of man's nature is that he is a sexual being.

There are many views of human sexuality, as many as there are societies, and often it seems that there are as many views as there are people. If we are to avail ourselves to others, as Chaplains, the assumption is that we have our thoughts together to some degree concerning our own sexual identity.

In moral questions regarding human sexual behaviour we might pivot on a basic principle - as man is, so should he act.

For purposes of discussion here, perhaps we can highlight two specific views of human sexuality and attempt to formulate some appropriate conclusions as to the state of affairs with

regard to the views promulgated via the ethic to which we subscribe as Christian Chaplains.

One view of sex can be said to find its basis in a philosophy which stresses man's individuality and freedom. Presuming that we are speaking of adults, the individual is said to be free and in the same vein is responsible for that same freedom.

An individual who might subscribe to this view inculcates his being with a basic principle: responsible freedom. He would feel that he would be evading this responsibility by letting his actions be dictated by an "outside force" eg: a Church, a society, or a moral code. This would be, to him, a surrendering to another the central core of his personhood, NAMELY his free responsibility for shaping his own life. His dictum might be: as in my moral life, so also in my sexual behaviour - what I do rests on my responsibility alone.

To this type of individual there is only one qualification. If he/she were to enter into a sexual relationship with another person - be it hetero or homo sexual, respect for the freedom of the "other" must prevail also. The other must not be harmed. It would appear that, atleast for consenting adults subscribing to this philosophy, any freely agreed upon sexual relationship is morally good provided no one else is 'hurt'. The decision here is purely private involving only those directly concerned. Respect is the only norm.

Having spoken to individuals subscribing to this sort of philosophy, I have seen these same individuals look on 'marriage' as a moral and legal necessity only when children are involved.

Marriage would be entered into lest that children be "cheated out of a stable home and education opportunity."

In another view of sexuality, there seems to be more involved in sexual behaviour than a purely private decision of those involved..Based on materials gleaned from our own life experiences as Priests - it becomes easy for us to conclude that there is much more involved in sexual behaviour than a purely private decision of those involved.

Sexual behaviour is seen to have biological, psychological and social dimensions and ramifications as well as purely individual aspects. To act without considering these wider aspects of sexuality is obviously irrational and immoral - if for no other reason, because of our failure to deal with all of the realities involved.

If we were to look at the sexual aspect of the human race, an initial biological observation might be evident - that the human race is divided into males and females. Making this observation causes one to wonder, perhaps, of wider questions: specifically, for example, what does this fact have to say about the rationality and morality of, say, homosexuality as an ideal?

There is also a social dimension to sexuality that is fundamental and basic: the sexual faculties are geared toward procreation - toward the continuity and development of the human race. I don't know whether I can conclude that they must always be used procreatively, but it seems that it would be more than just naive to deny that they have anything to do with procreation

or to claim, as in the prior mentioned view of sexuality for example, that sexuality is purely a private affair. The survival of the human race depends, in part atleast, upon the exercise of sexual intercourse.

What we have spoken of here is true of both humans and animals. In man however, the biological and procreative aspects of sexuality involves the whole person: sex is both personal and interpersonal. An individual's growth as a human person would be intimately bound up with their sexual relationships in most situations. This could shed a new light on the morality of sex without love or commitment, even the very nature of permanent commitment.

There is an individual dimension of sexuality. A man's growth in freedom and responsibility as an individual is a function of his sexual behaviour. A man's individuality is constituted by his free and responsible control of sexual activity. This same activity ought to function in a social context as an expression of and fostering interpersonal love.

This second view of sexuality is essentially consistent with the Christian conception in our western cultural setting. In the past, however, Roman Catholicism has emphasized the biological and the procreative to the seeming detriment of the personal and the individual. ⁽²⁾ In such an emphasis, interpersonal and psychological values take second place to procreative values about such things as birth control and homosexuality. ⁽³⁾

Preserving the dignity of the human body created in the image and likeness of God, the Church, however, has come, especially

since Vatican II, to reexamine some of its pronouncements regarding sexuality and clarify its teachings taking into account recent scholarship and research.

Hopefully, having established the presence of some basic views on sexuality we can now proceed to look at some of the problems encountered in counselling those with sexual difficulties.

Let us look at the difficulty of counselling the homosexual as an instance. When we speak of homosexuality as overt, somehow, it seems as though we have to clarify in our own minds: is it a sin, an illness, or a variation on normality.

The average homosexual we might meet in the service is usually physically normal and is usually unresponsive to the sexual and emotional attraction of the opposite sex - but instead, he is susceptible to the sexual and emotional attraction of those of his/her own sex. ④

Perhaps one of the primary reasons why homosexuals find it difficult to deal with their plight is because society has made homosexuals seem, in their own minds at least, to be outcasts and generally unwanted. They feel, therefore, that their situation is hopeless and ultimately decide that only another of like preferences can ever be their friend.

The common view among homosexuals is that there is no problem about homosexuality. The problem is one of prejudice toward the homosexual. In a culture like ours, which for the most part puts a premium on heterosexuality, the homosexual is defined as deviant and immoral. For the homosexual there is nothing that says that

sexual love cannot be directed towards members of one's own sex as well as towards the opposite sex. ⁽⁵⁾ For him, the loneliness, immaturity and defensiveness are normal reactions to the prejudices of others rather than a symptom of emotional illness or moral difficulties. This falls in line with the first "view" I spoke of earlier in this paper regarding sexuality.

The second "view" would challenge the view that heterosexuality is purely a culturally defined ideal. As I noted earlier, biologically, there are two sexes. Their attraction and complementarity are common to all cultures. Their sexual cooperation is vital to the survival of the species. Obviously then, heterosexuality is more than an accident of a culture.

It would also appear that there is evidence that psychological and personal growth is a function of heterosexual rather than homosexual relationships which tend to be unchallenging, impermanent and more often than not static.

Sex viewed ~~in~~ its whole human reality is of a heterosexual kind. If this is the way that it is, then homosexuality cannot be held up as a moral ideal.

The question then arises: is homosexuality inherently immoral? It would seem, to me, that it is a defect in maturity rather than a failure in morality. Psychiatry tells us that homosexuality represents an arrest in sexual development. ⁽⁶⁾ Most children, following a stage of homosexual attraction, pass on to interest in the opposite sex. The homosexual, for emotional and often environmental reasons, does not follow suit but instead remains fixated at the earlier stage. It would seem that he is no more

morally responsible for this emotional pattern than other people are for their other types of neurotic emotional patterns.

Granting that the homosexual is not morally responsible for his feelings, a further question arises: is he morally responsible for overt homosexual acts?

Moral responsibility is proportionate to the freedom and self-awareness with which the act is done. Both of these qualities are impaired, but not necessarily removed all together, in actions which flow from neurotic emotional patterns of living. Utilizing this mode of thought no special moral condemnations appear to be in order for the homosexual.

Another problem area that arises when we speak of sexual difficulties is the area of masturbation. In the "manuals" of Moral Theology, masturbation is listed as unnatural and a grave sin against purity.^⑦ Traditional thinking would note that willful masturbation is always "grave matter." However, if it happens unintentionally and consequently is not a willful and free act, the manuals would say that there is no sin involved.

Today, theologians are taking a new look at the problem of masturbation in the light of new advances in psychology. Many of these theologians feel that while the traditional teachings are correct, they do not give enough attention to the many influences which reduce or remove one's freedom in performing this, ergo: reducing the sinfulness involved.

I do not feel that it is too far-fetched to conclude that while a person may knowingly and, in a sense, willingly masturbate,

this action may be brought on by any number of physical and/or psychological pressures which may reduce the freedom of choice which must be necessarily present for serious sin to exist. ③

Our ministry certainly shows that in many instances, masturbation may (and often does) occur when the person is tense, depressed or extremely tired. These pressures can and frequently do limit the freedom of the act, and so not every act of masturbation, even when performed consciously, would be seriously sinful..

Some might point out that the practice of masturbation is the rule rather than the exception. This seems to be especially true among adolescents and often the young person who might confess masturbation has not in reality broken off his relationship with God - which is what serious sin is all about.

In dealing with the client and his problem, I might advise him/her to search deep within themself to attempt to discern the reason(s) for their actions. If he finds that masturbation is but one one symptom of a generally self-centered life - if he consistently tends to prefer his own well-being and pleasure to the demands of God and of his neighbor, then he might well be concerned about his moral situation.

If on the other hand, he discovers that his occasional acts of masturbation, which he may consider morally wrong in themselves, are out of character with the rest of his life and that they do not change his general relationship of love and concern for God and neighbor, then he could conclude that the individual acts are not seriously sinful and he may look upon them as reminders that

he is a sinning being in constant need of God's help to overcome a possibly sinful tendency.

This same rule of thumb may be applied, in my mind, by those who from long habit fall more frequently while some are compulsive masturbators who may need psychiatric assistance.

You might be asking yourself at this point: how do these problems come about? I think, first of all, that it would be safe to assume that the average person gets little of no sex education making them prime targets for sexual difficulties.

For example, I would venture to point out that the majority of young people who have confided in me as to their difficulties with what they have called homosexuality and/or masturbation have literally stumbled into it, and by the time that they realized that it wasn't for them and/or that it was intrinsically wrong they were "hooked."

Our education in matters sexual usually comes from vehicles like Playboy, the movies and television. We find ourselves talking, wondering and even drooling about sex. So, I feel that we can say that such a lack of knowledge is fairly common and so we can put down ignorance as one factor in the problem.

I think that it would also be safe to assume that perhaps both of these problems, masturbation and homosexuality, are more often than not symptoms rather than a disease. Perhaps these "symptoms" are really signals of something else that is going on inside a person. ⑨

For example, take a soldier who is really not that popular

on the job or in the barracks. He is a loner - he is really not too sharp in any way. He has a lot of attendant problems to go along with all of this. He has lots of problems inside; he really feels bad. He could compensate (to use the term loosely) by getting a hobby or involving himself in some humanitarian effort at the service club or something similar - but he doesn't - he gets involved with himself sexually. He frequents the bars, etc. and may end up masturbating himself many times each week.

I feel too, that he will do it not so much because he consciously wants to but because unconsciously these activities represent a temporary escape from his other real problems.

Perhaps, as a counsellor and a Confessor, if I saw such a situation developing I might advise the soldier (client) to stop wasting his time concentrating on the "sins" of sexuality and would try to help him to deal with his other problems. If I was able to reach him in time and was able to help him come to terms with them (the disease) the sexual difficulties (a symptom) might cease, to a large degree, to become a central problem in his life. ⁽¹⁰⁾

I would feel that, speaking generally, most of these dilemmas are not engaged in purposely. The penitent could feel rotten everytime that the act is performed, But it would seem, for the most part, that coming to a realization is in order. Coming to a realization that unconsciously he may be taking his problems out on himself. His sexual problems may be but a childish symptom behind the real disease - his personal problems, his

feeling of inadequacy as a person, etc..^④ I could speculate that the penitent may simply not be coming to terms with his developing personality. I might even attempt to help the person find other outlets to express his personality.

I think that these problems reflect, not necessarily that the penitent is an evil person, but moreso that his difficulties are signals that perhaps he is not solving his real problems.

In the case of masturbation there is a particular difficulty that may prove to be the root on which the real problem pivots. This can be referred to as the natural "tension" difficulty. Young people today seem to experience this tension more today than ever before. It is the strain between growing up biologically early and emotionally late. Young boys, for example, grow up physically earlier today. Compound^⑤ this with the fact that in today's society you've got to go to school longer which means you've got to depend on your family longer and delay taking on responsibility and decisions. You are kept emotionally immature for a longer period of time. So, it comes down to a "tension" difficulty: we get our sexual drives earlier and our emotional ability to handle them later. We get strong drives earlier than our ability to control and deal with them adequately.

Another "reason" (cause) we often hear about is: "...everybody is doing it, it must be normal." This type of reasoning^⑥ speaks for itself....

In the case of masturbation: it is an immature response to life, catering to an already existing selfishness and self-

centeredness. (12)

And what about homosexuality? Generally, I think that the same rule of thumb applies - however, the issue here is more complex and must be dealt with prudently and after much reflection as to the values to which the Counsellor/Confessor himself subscribes. I feel that we have to be careful to distinguish between approval and acceptance, for example. That homosexuality is a perversion of sexuality; is in need of repair and that can possibly be "cured" are the types of things that the Confessor should attempt to reason out in his own mind and establish an attitude about cognizant of what he represents to the people and his calling. That sexual variations are or are not tolerated and talked about more freely than they were before does not necessarily mean that they are any better understood.

What I have tried to present in this paper is perhaps the basic inclination and state of affairs of those inclined to seek counselling assistance to deal with what may or may not be a sexual problem. Against a background of differing views of human sexuality we've come to experience a people torn between freedom and fulfillment.

Along with this growth and development of man and his world we sense a similar phenomenon occurring within the Church. There is an obvious move, since Vatican II, from primary emphasis on the biological and procreative aspects of sexuality to more concern with the personal and the individual - the interpersonal and the psychological.

Examining these views has led us to consider two of the problem areas which arise in considering the sexual dimension of our client - homosexuality and masturbation. Looking at these areas against the background "views" that I initially postulated in this paper - an obvious dichotomy with regard to motive and goal arises with regard to manifestation of one's sexuality on almost a purely human level.

Once these concepts and their ramifications are established we can begin to deal with similiar matters when they arise in the confessional and/or counselling situation.

We would have to begin our investigation of such a proeedure by making some careful distinctions which ultimately will be of some value in resolving any questions regarding possible culpability.

The nature of sin will have to be carefully defined (i.e., serious matter, sufficient knowledge and reflection and final and full consent).

It would be important to recall that the Church has made known it's position relative to the sexual diversions that we have been discussing here atleast in essence. They are objectively wrong - violating the objective norm - but subjectively the degree of culpability is relative to the situation and the individual's ability to exercise that freedom intrinsic to man's being and nature. As the freedom decreases so does the culpability.

Priests that I have spoken to regarding their experiences in this regard, especially confessors of young people, maintain that, in most instances where these diversions occur, there is usually in reality, very little freedom involved (if one subscribes to the view of thought we have proposed here earlier) ergo: the penitent

is unable to really make a moral decision by himself.

If the soldier is in the Confessional situation and celebrating the Sacrament of Penance, he is probably aware of something that he feels is wrong and/or some tension between his own innate thinking pattern and his manifested lifestyle. This is, of course, providing that the penitent introduces his difficulty in the confessional context.

At this point, as Confessor/Counsellor, we should be able to recognize a "teachable moment."

Then, utilizing the grace of the sacrament, the education and basic wisdom of psychology as well as one's own personal and pastoral experience, the Confessor/Counsellor can attempt to help the penitent come to some conclusions, to begin atleast, to sort out the inconsistencies in his/her own life.

But this may not be enough - further counselling may be needed to insure some positive and real growth. For example, there may be more to the situation than meets the eye.

As an example here, the married man who masturbates as a form of birth control because he has strong drives sexually and a weak wallet or a frigid wife - The single man or woman who masturbates to get the "benefits" of the married state without the responsibilities or as a result to the "tension" phenomenon - Or the homosexual who not only entertains the sexual desires but finds himself involved in overt acts.

Though most may be said to have "stumbled" onto the lifestyle and perhaps are transient "one-timers" many are addicted personalities which require additional conferences and perhaps might

need professional help.

Helpful also is the manner of the priest confessor/counsellor. His ability to practice patience, kindness and sensitivity without compromising his own beliefs and principles is essential.

Finally, sexuality, in any shape or form, refers to the entire person as a sexual being, it is not just an area between one's legs. Sex is the whole person - the whole body, mind and all of one's feelings. We can never act except as sexual beings.

Everything we do, we do as men and women. Being a sexual person means that we use all of our bodily and mental powers in the service of others.

The sexual diversions that I have attempted to examine here, as we have seen, consume much of our energy and turn it back in on ourselves instead of directing it outwards towards others in love. Consider the manner of Jesus.....especially His TOTAL response to others.

Intrinsic to our effectiveness in these areas also is that we have taken the time and effort, as Ministers and as Chaplains, to think through and scrutinize our own position and that we are somehow comfortable with most of the conclusions we have posited for ourselves. Granted, we won't have all the answers but having done our own homework we will be better able to listen and respond with some sensitivity and intelligence.

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